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REGULAR ARTICLE

Interaction Analysis and Psychology: A Dialogical Perspective

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Abstract Interaction analysis is not a prerogative of any discipline in social sciences. It has its own history within each disciplinary field and is related to specific research objects. From the standpoint of psychology, this article first draws upon a distinction between factorial and dialogical conceptions of interaction. It then briefly presents the basis of a dialogical approach in psychology and focuses upon four basic assumptions. Each of them is examined on a theoretical and on a methodological level with a leading question: to what extent is it possible to develop analytical tools that are fully coherent with dialogical assumptions? The conclusion stresses the difficulty of developing methodological tools that are fully consistent with dialogical assumptions and argues that there is an unavoidable tension between accounting for the complexity of an interaction and using methodological tools which necessarily "monologise" this complexity.

Keywords Dialogism · Interaction · Methodology · Interaction analysis

The Notion of Interaction in Psychology: A Matter of Misunderstanding

The study of interaction is an integral part of the history of psychology. Work carried out by pioneers such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Kurt Lewin and George Herbert Mead can be seen as a response to dominant strands in psychology, namely associationism and its heir, behaviourism. For Piaget, the notion of interaction drew upon a constructivist stance and aimed at showing that individuals actively develop their intelligence through interaction with their physical and social environment. For Vygotsky too, the study of interaction was based upon a constructivist stance but

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Vygotsky's research considered social relationships as an integral part of human development and viewed language as a cultural artefact for cognitive and social development. For Lewin (a follower of the Gestalt theory), the study of interaction stemmed from the assumption that the subject and the environment are interdependent and belong to the same field. For him, the subject's action could not be understood independently of the field in which it occurred (Lewin 1951a). As regards Mead (1967), he showed that intelligence (or mind) arises through communication or what he called a "conversation of symbolic gestures". According to him, a gesture becomes a significant symbol only when the partners in interaction give the same meaning to this gesture or, in his words, when a gesture provokes the same response in the individual who did it as in the individual to whom it was addressed. In other terms, meaning is not a property of a gesture (or by extension of language), but a property of interaction.

This schematic overview shows that the notion of interaction is controversial. First of all, depending upon the object of study, more or less attention may be paid to verbal interactions. In fact, in psychology, the study of interactions may include behaviour (think of Piaget's research) and non-verbal interactions, for example, in the field of mother-infant interactions (Stern 1995) or mother-father-infant interactions (Fivaz-Depeursinge and Corboz-Warnery 1999). Secondly, when they come to the study of verbal interactions (which will be my own focus), scholars rely upon different assumptions about the role of language and the relationship between the subject and the environment. Thirdly, they may pay more or less attention to the physical artefacts that mediate interpersonal interactions. This means that the notion of interaction is conceptualized in various ways.

Starting from this observation, the aim of this article is to focus on a dialogical conception of interaction in order to answer the following question: to what extent is it possible to develop analytical tools that are fully coherent with dialogical assumptions?

Drawing on a dialogical framework inspired by Bakhtin and more recent trends (e.g. Billig 1996; François 2005; Marková 2003; Linell 1998, 2005; Salazar Orvig 1999; Wertsch 1991) and following on from Marková's work (Marková 1997), I first present two contrasting conceptions of interaction: the first factorial, the second dialogical. I then briefly present some basic elements of a dialogical approach in psychology, examine four of its basic assumptions, and for each of them discuss their methodological implications. In conclusion, I stress the difficulty of developing methodological tools that are fully consistent with dialogical assumptions and argue that there is an unavoidable tension between accounting for the complexity of an interaction and using methodological tools which necessarily tend to "monologise" this complexity.

Let me then start by showing that the various definitions of the notion of interaction can be grouped under two contrasting conceptions: the factorial and the dialogical.

The Factorial Conception of Interaction

According to a factorial conception (Marková 1997), interaction is defined as a relationship between two (or more) entities that influence each other. Interaction is viewed as a chain of action-reaction or a "chain of stimulus-response" between the

subject and the environment. In developmental psychology, a good illustration of this conception is offered by post-Piagetian research into the role of context in cognitive development (e.g., Donaldson 1978; Light and Butterworth 1992). In this field, typical empirical questions were: what is the influence of the context on the child's level of conservation? Does a modification of the test instruction (or of the adult's actions) influence the child's cognitive level? Does the child's answer reflect her real level of development or is it only an effect of the situation? All these questions were based upon similar epistemological assumptions: (a) the context is a set of external characteristics (or variables) that influence the subject, (b) under certain conditions, the role of the context can be neutralised (or "controlled"), for example if the researcher asks unambiguous ("clear") questions, (c) language is the "royal path" to reaching the subject's mental state. These three assumptions imply that under some circumstances the context in which a task is submitted to a child, and the characteristics of the task itself can be neutralised. Moreover, it implies that language can be unambiguous or transparent.

Another illustration of a factorial conception of interaction is found in social psychology, in the study of group dynamics. In this field, Robert Bales is well known for developing a method ("Interaction Process Analysis") aimed at describing interpersonal dynamics in small groups (Bales 1950; for a discussion on Bales and Conversation Analysis, see Peräkylä 2004). His scheme consisted of coding each action according to pre-defined categories (e.g., "asks for opinion" vs. "gives opinion"). In contradiction with Bales' theoretical definition of a group, which was deeply inspired by Lewin, the group then appeared to be the result of individual actions. Later on, under the influence of speech act theory, coding schemes based upon similar principles (e.g., Stiles 1992) were, and still are widely used (for a methodological discussion, see Linell and Marková 1993).

The factorial conception of interaction is undoubtedly the one most frequently used in psychology. As Schegloff claims, one probable reason for this is that cognitivist and other "psychologically-oriented" disciplines take "the single 'minded', embodied individual person as the basic, enduring, integrally-organized reality to be studied" (Cmejrková and Prevignano 2003, p. 36). Another related reason is that psychology mainly stems from the natural sciences. Therefore its principal empirical tool is the experimental method, which requires the isolation of single variables, and can lead, thanks to statistical tools, to their combination in factors, clusters, etc. In other words, the factorial conception also derives from the tools that researchers use to collect and analyse their data.

The Dialogical Conception of Interaction

The notion of interaction may, however, be conceptualised quite differently, as shown, in particular, in the work by G.H. Mead and K. Lewin. A central concept developed by Mead is that of "conversation of symbolic gestures" which accounts for thinking processes and language. Whereas a "conversation of gestures" is a simple chain of stimulus and response, which can be found in animals or in elementary types of human interaction, conversation of *symbolic* gestures is, according to Mead, specific to the human mind. It consists of a triple or threefold

relationship, which, in Mead's terms, is composed of the gesture of the first organism, the adjustive response (namely the interpretation) of the second organism, and the resultant social act that the gesture initiates. Consequently, meaning is not a "psychical content (a content of mind or consciousness)" (Mead 1967, p. 76); it originates neither in the speaker's mind, nor in language as a code (*la langue*), but is dependent upon the way in which speaker A interprets speaker B's gesture and (more importantly) expects B to interpret A's gesture. This conception of meaning (see also Marková 1990) is very close to conceptions that were developed later on, in particular in Conversation Analysis, with the notion of third turn repair (Schegloff 1992).

As regards Lewin, his originality was to consider that individual behaviour cannot be understood independently of the field or life space in which it occurs (Lewin 1951b). Life space is a "quasi-stationary equilibrium" which results from a joint action between a certain physical and social environment, and a certain psychological state. Life space moves along with the physical and social environment. In other terms, the individual and the environment form an indivisible unit of analysis and are interdependent. Hence, for Lewin, issues such as attitude change and behavioural change (food habits, for example) could not be explained without taking into account the field in which the individual acts.

The factorial *vs*. dialogical conceptions of interaction give way to a diverging definition of the unit of analysis which should be adopted to analyse human behaviour. According to a factorial conception, the unit of analysis is the individual conceived of as an entity which is subjected to various external influences. In such models, environmental factors are added to the core unit of analysis, the individual. Consequently, the notion of context is defined as a set of external variables that have certain objective characteristics. By contrast, according to a dialogical conception, the unit of analysis is the interaction as a whole, for example the individual *and* their social and physical environment. In this perspective, the physical environment (or the "context") is not only external, it is constructed by the subject who actively interprets it. In Lewin's work, the term "ecological psychology" refers to the fact that the context in which the subject acts is also an outcome of his or her own psychological activity.

Starting from this dialogical conception of interaction, I shall now broaden the field and present some general characteristics of a dialogical approach to language and thinking.

The Dialogical Approach in Psychology: Theoretical and Methodological Implications

At first sight, the terms *dialogue* and *dialogical* refer to situations in which two or more persons talk together. However, in the sense adopted here, the term *dialogue* has a more extended meaning (Linell 1998, 2009). For many linguists and psychologists (e.g., Wertsch 1991), the terms *dialogue* and *dialogical* refer to Bakhtin (e.g. 1986) who developed what he called *metalingvistika* (translated by the term *metalinguistics* in the American and English editions of Bakhtin's work) which, according to Todorov (1984), is a precursor of linguistic pragmatics. Broadly put, a

dialogical approach takes the dialogue between the subject (I) and the Other (you) as a starting point for a theorisation of language and cognition. As Marková showed (2003; see also Marková 2006), *dialogicality* (according to her terminology) is both an ontological and an epistemological stance that has many philosophical roots (see also Linell 1998, 2005, 2009). Observing social psychology from a dialogical stance, she claimed that social psychology is mostly based upon a presupposition of stability in both thinking and action, and lacks theories of social knowledge based upon the concept of change (see also Shotter and Billig 1998). According to Marková, making distinctions or thinking in antinomies (for example right/left; good/evil; light/dark) are "such fundamental characteristics of the human mind" (p. 31) that they should be the point of departure of any theory of social knowledge that seeks to account for the heterogeneous and multifaceted nature of thinking. In a brief historical survey, she shows how, after Hegel, many scholars (Tarde, Jung, Freud, Wallon, etc.) have tried to integrate the idea that human mind is made of tensions, contractions, conflicts. As a basic antinomy, the Ego-Alter distinction leads to the idea that dialogicality is fundamental to human intelligence. By "dialogicality", she means:

> the capacity of the human mind to conceive, create, and communicate about realities in terms of the "Alter" (Marková 2003, p. 85)

According to her, the mind is "the capacity of human beings to communicate, to make sense of signs, symbols and meanings in their experience, as well as to create new signs, symbols and meanings" (p. 23). Human thinking and action are conceived of as activities that are accomplished and constructed through language and social interactions. Individuals are perceived as being heterogeneous subjects who draw upon various resources to make sense of their environment. Moreover, the Subject and the Others are thought of in terms of being complementary elements which are in dialogical tension.

Defined in this broad way, the dialogical approach has resulted in disciplinary reconfigurations that have shifted the boundaries between disciplines in social sciences. It is thus not an exaggeration to say that a new disciplinary field is emerging, which takes human interaction as a research object (Grossen 2008). In this new disciplinary field, interaction analysis is a basic tool which, as the studies reported through this article show, is used in order to understand how human beings make sense of their environment and of their emotional life, how they cooperate in everyday life and in various social organisations, in order to construct new bodies of knowledge, to work, etc.

However, talking of a "dialogical approach" in the singular is possible as long as we give a general definition of dialogicality. As soon as we enter into the details of the many theories founded on these general assumptions, we can but state that speaking in the singular is misleading. In fact, on a historical level, be it on the side of philosophy or on that of psychology and other social sciences, the sources of dialogism are multiple (Marková 2003; Linell 2009). Depending on these sources, the way of exploiting the paradigm of dialogism may be quite different and give way to various theoretical strands. So, speaking of "a" dialogical approach does not hold if we consider the specific theories that emerge from these assumptions. The differences between these various theories are due to multiple factors: one reason lies in the specificity of the research object under study, which might lead the authors to give precedence to some authors. For example, the dialogical self theory (Hermans

2001; Hermans and Kempen 1993; Gonçalves and Salgado 2001; Salgado and Gonçalves 2007; Valsiner 2005), which aims at developing a dynamic account for the organisation and functioning of the self, draws not only on Bakhtin but also on William James, who inspired the key-notion of "I-position", as well as on George Herbert Mead with his theory of the self. One of the specificities of this dialogical trend is to renew the field of therapeutic change by providing a theoretical framework that provides a dynamic view of the self.

In social psychology, Michael Billig proposed a reinterpretation of classic themes of this field, in particular attitude change, by putting emphasis upon the argumentative nature of human thinking and by developing what he called *discursive psychology* (e.g., Billig 1996), a trend which appeared to be fully in line with a Bakhtinian approach to language and human thinking (Shotter and Billig 1998). With respect to the former trend, the specificity of discursive psychology is to put much emphasis on a close analysis of the dynamics of discourse in the analysis of their data.

As another example of a theoretical strand pertaining to a dialogical approach, we may also mention socio-cultural psychology inspired in particular by Vygotsky. In this case, the research object is the development of thinking and learning (Mercer and Littleton 2007; Muller Mirza and Perret-Clermont 2009; Rojas-Drummond et al. 2006; Wertsch 1991), as well as thinking and learning in various situations (workplaces in particular). In this trend, Bakhtin proved to be an interesting complement to Vygotsky for his theory of discourse which opened the way to the study of discourses that are responsive to broader social contexts than the here-and-now context.

Of course, these examples, that represent three major theoretical trends pertaining to a dialogical approach, do not cover the entire range of theories that might be labelled "dialogical", but they suffice to show that the dialogical approach is a vast and heterogeneous field which is criss-crossed by various debates and disagreements. This is also why, in what follows, I shall not be able to do justice to this variety and shall mainly draw upon one of these trends, pertaining to social psychology and socio-cultural psychology. My main theoretical background was inspired by scholars who, in the post-Piagetian and post-Vygotskian trends, have worked on learning and development and have integrated the issue of dialogue into their models (e.g. Perret-Clermont 1980; Perret-Clermont et al. 1991; Mercer and Littleton 2007). In this field, Ragnar Rommetveit (1992, 2003), who was deeply influenced by Bakhtin (among others), was the first to introduce a dialogical approach in developmental cognitive psychology. He did it by starting from radical criticisms against mainstream cognitivism and psycholinguistics (Josephs 1998). My own background has been further influenced by the work of various colleagues from psychology or linguistics with whom I had the opportunity to work on therapeutic discourse and focus groups (Marková et al. 2007).

Drawing on this background, I shall now discuss four central assumptions of a dialogical approach which refer to the co-construction of meaning, the multivoicedness, the context as a construction, and tools as a non-human agency. For each assumption, I shall first provide a brief theoretical introduction and then present some analytical tools that try to align on these dialogical assumptions. However, a close examination of these methodological tools will lead me to discuss their

limitations and, eventually, to ask whether it is actually possible to develop analytical tools that are fully coherent with dialogical assumptions.

The Co-construction of Meaning

One key-element of a dialogical approach is that language is fundamentally polysemic and that its meaning is not predetermined by the linguistic code but constructed within a certain discursive situation. While this claim might seem self-evident for linguists working on discourse, this is certainly not usual in psychology.[1] More specifically, three dialogical core assumptions about language are, in my view, still not fully acknowledged in psychology. The first assumption regards precisely the fact that language is polysemic and that its meanings do not lie within the words but in their use in certain social situations. In this view (which reminds us of Mead), meanings are not inscribed within language; they are constructed through discourse and derive from an interactive work. The second assumption, which is more specifically stressed by Bakhtin (1981) and Voloshinov (1986), is that any discourse is always addressed to an interlocutor (addressivity) and is therefore based upon an anticipation of the interlocutor's comprehension (responsivity). As Rommetveit puts it in an interview given to Josephs (1998):

> What is asserted in any particular case of communication outside a Platonic universe of pure ideas (...) makes sense if and only if it entails an answer to some explicitly raised or tacitly taken for granted question (p. 196).

In other words, the interlocutor's possible response is contained within the speaker's discourse, and any piece of discourse has one component made up of responsivity and another of addressivity (Bakhtin 1935/1981). A third assumption is more familiar to psychologists, since it draws upon Vygotsky's conception of language, and claims that language has not only a social function, but also a symbolic function (Vygotsky 1988). Language is conceived of as a semiotic tool that enables the development of *higher psychological functions* and accounts for the specificity of human intelligence.

Put together, these three assumptions have drastic methodological consequences for the study of human cognition. They imply that usual research objects, for example human cognition and learning, have to focus upon joint activity as it is achieved within a certain context. The research object then becomes one of examining through which processes the participants in an interaction make sense of the situation in which they are involved and how they reach some states of intersubjectivity which enable them to carry out a task or to reach their goals. The unit of analysis is not the isolated individual but the individual and the other present participants as well as absent participants (or third parties) which might indirectly orientate the participants' actions. Moreover, if, with Vygotsky (1988), we assume that tools play a fundamental role (a semiotic function) in the development of thinking, then the unit of analysis also includes the tools that the

[1] There are of course numerous exceptions (for example Marková et al. 1995; Rommetveit, 1992; the trend of cultural psychology (e.g., Bruner, 1990, 1996); Wertsch, 1991); the trend of discursive psychology (e.g., Billig, 1996).

participants use to carry out an activity. There is thus a shift from the study of an isolated individual seen as a constructor of his or her environment to the study of joint processes of meaning construction.

The process of co-construction of meaning has been studied in numerous situations, for example classroom interactions, peer interactions at school, workplaces, therapeutic discourse. In the latter field, the research object deals with the interactional processes through which the therapists and the patients make sense of the "problem" and transform it throughout their encounters (Buttny 1996; Grossen and Salazar Orvig 2006; Peräkylä et al. 2008; Vehviläinen 2003). The "problem" which is talked about during a therapeutic session is not conceived of as the client's inner mental world, which is coded (or "translated") into language, but as the result of an intersubjective process implying reciprocal attunement (or alignments). The "problem" is not simply put into words, its meaning is negotiated through interactional work, for a certain purpose in a particular social and institutional setting (Grossen and Apothéloz 1996). It is thus fundamentally addressed to the Other and constructed through the Other.

Methodological Implications

This theoretical framework implies that on a methodological level, the analytical tools have to account for the interlocutory process. I will now refer to a study carried out by Grossen and Apothéloz (1996) in order to present one method that we have used to reach this goal, and to discuss the limits of this method. In this study as in many others (e.g., Antaki et al. 2005), reformulation was used as an analytical tool in order to analyse how certain "problems" were thematised and transformed throughout a therapeutic session. At an operational level, reformulation was defined as a three-phase sequence: (1) a source (the reformulated discourse); (2) a reformulation marker, which introduces the reformulation and may be either a metadiscursive clause such as *you told me that*, *you mentioned that*, etc. or a reformulation marker such as *in other words*, *namely*, *well*, *thus*, etc.; (3) the reformulation itself, which can be either a self-reformulation or an other-reformulation. The interactional construction of meaning was then analysed by comparing the source with the reformulation. Excerpt 1 is taken from a first session with two therapists (a woman [WT], and a man), a father (F), a mother (M) and their two children.[2] Just before this excerpt, F alluded twice to the existence of conflicts within the couple. He spoke of their children's unwillingness to obey and of his attempts to exert his authority.

(1)

1. WT: (to F) *when you talk* about misunderstanding in the sense
2. of misplaced understanding I don't know but it seems to me that
3. there was nevertheless a sort of complementarity
4. F: *that's to say* understanding on my wife's part that [I felt like
5. that] (...)

[2] The original language of all excerpts is French. In the transcripts [...] indicates an overlap, words in capitals indicate that the speaker stresses a word and + means a brief pause.

Excerpt 1 contains two marked reformulations (in italics): another-reformulation introduced by a metadiscursive clause (line 1); a self-reformulation introduced by a marker (line 4). The sources of WT's reformulation are reported in Excerpts 2 and 3:

(2)

1. F: no I think that the thing which is very present the thing which is
2. very evident in our couple is that their mother brings gentleness
3. understanding even if it's how can I put it even if it's misplaced
4. understanding if I can say that because he doesn't want to eat because
5. he's not hungry but he'll eat after the meal or things like that er and me
6. I bring authority as well as bringing a lot of affection but er when I
7. want things a certain way that's that even if I have to lose my temper

(3)

1. F: exactly this is where I come back to to to this UNDERSTANDING
2. which was sometimes misplaced it's that now they don't do as they're
3. told anymore or at least less a lot LESS and even things that with me I
4. simply told them and they did it and that was it with the mother all
5. that's finished

The comparison between the source and the reformulation shows that WT takes up the expression *misplaced understanding* used by F in the excerpts 2 (lines 3–4) and 3 (lines 1–2) and summarises F's description of his role and that of his wife, using the expression *complementarity*. In so doing, WT introduces a divergence with respect to F's discourse. Whereas F's term *misplaced* suggests some negative evaluation, WT's term *complementarity* frames the reported episode in a positive way, and represents implicitly a refusal to see M as the person responsible for the couple's conflicts.

This analytical tool (for details see Apothéloz and Grossen 1995) enabled us to study the transformation of the "problem" from the first formulation to the end of the session and to analyse long pieces of dialogue. However, in the light of a dialogical approach, this method raises three main issues. Firstly, what importance should be paid to linguistic markers? In fact, considering that reformulations are indicated by linguistic markers (and only by them) amounts to attributing intentions to the speakers from the words they use. And this goes against the dialogical assumption that meaning is constructed through interlocution. In addition, not all reformulations are introduced by linguistic markers. However, broadening the methodological definition of reformulation to include non-marked reformulations (e.g., Grossen 1996) may imply that every piece of discourse is a reformulation. Secondly, if we admit with Bakhtin (1935/1981) that any discourse is always a sort of reformulation of other discourses, then another difficulty emerges: some reformulations may be difficult, or even impossible, to identify, for example when a speaker reformulates a piece of discourse that he or she heard or said in another situation. As a consequence, the distinction between formulation and reformulation is relevant only if we assume that a piece of discourse is a strictly individual production and that the process of reformulation takes place within the observed situation.

A third and related issue concerns the distinction between self- and other-reformulations. Again, if we assume that any discourse is always a response to

previous (real or virtual) discourse (Goodwin 2006), as well as an answer to an anticipated response, then the distinction between self- and other-reformulation is disputable. In fact, if a self-reformulation is an anticipation of the addressee's interpretation, then in a sense it is also nothing but... an other-reformulation. Moreover, the distinction between self- and other-reformulations implies that the turn is the unit of analysis and, thus, an individual production, whereas Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) precisely showed that even a single turn is a collaborative production.

So, despite the fact that reformulation deals with interlocution, it does not fully meet the dialogical assumptions that guided the choice of the method (for other methods aimed at grasping the dialogism of therapeutic interview, see Salazar Orvig and Grossen 2008). One could of course simply conclude that the method was irrelevant. However, many methods based upon interlocution take the turn as a unit of analysis so that, in my view, the issue goes beyond this particular example and shows the difficulty of transforming a dialogical stance into analytical tools. Is it actually possible to develop a method that is fully dialogical? Let me further examine this question.

Multivoicedness and Heteroglossia

In his essay "Discourse in the Novel" (Bakhtin 1935/1981) developed the idea that any discourse is fundamentally dialogical, namely is orientated towards discourses which have already been spoken by other people, and is determined by a response which is not already uttered but requested and anticipated. According to Bakhtin, dialogism is an internal property of language, and discourse itself is characterised by "social heteroglossia" and multivoicedness. Any discourse contains the traces of previous discourses, is made of different genres (rhetoric, journalistic, literary, scientific, etc.), and echoes discourses (or voices) uttered by other people in different places at different times. According to Bakhtin, others voices are the background on which the prose artist (and, let us say, by extension the speaker's voice) is placed and echoed. Thus, discourse is fundamentally heterogeneous or, in other words, stratified by different genres and voices. According to Bakhtin, professional jargons (the discourse of physicians, politicians, teachers, etc.) are one aspect of this stratification of discourse. They are not only defined by lexical aspects, but represent particular forms of interpretation of the world. So, as Bakhtin puts it, a professional jargon, as does any discourse, constitutes a specific point of view on the world:

> (...) all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views each characterised by its own objects, meanings and values (Bakthin 1935/1981, p. 291–292)

Over the last years, the study of "professional" or "institutional" discourse has gained more and more importance in social sciences (e.g., Candlin 2002; Drew and Sorjonen 1997; Gunnarsson et al. 1997; Linell and Sarangi 1998; Sarangi and Roberts 1999; Mäkitalo 2006). Studying the field of psychotherapy, social, and medical work, many scholars showed that the practitioners' discourse draws upon

shared and tacit assumptions which have been developed in certain communities of practice and which guide the professionals' interpretations and actions (e.g., Drew and Heritage 1992). They also showed that the practitioners' discourse is composed of various discourses which have been developed over time by different institutions, for example medicine, law, psychiatry, education, etc., as illustrated by the use of jargon, of certain communicative genres and of certain routines.

This research strand is interesting not only because it accounts for actual professional practices, but also because it challenges the very notion of face-to-face interaction by showing that a "simple" relationship between two persons is in reality populated by many other social actors. Moreover, it shows that answering the question "who speaks?" is more complex than it seems and leads to further questions such as: what voices are included in the speaker's discourse (Marková et al. 2007)? From which discursive position does the speaker speak? What social identity does he or she put to the fore when he or she speaks? All these questions are challenging for the field of psychology because they question two classic dichotomies: the self-other dichotomy and the language-cognition dichotomy (Linell 2005, 2009; Marková 2003). In other words, by using language, individuals construct themselves as subjects through the words of others. On a psychological level, it means that subjectivity is an emerging property of intersubjectivity and that individuals themselves are heterogeneous, namely made out of and through different Others. This view is congruent with the theory of dialogical self and its notion of I-positioning (Coelho and Figueiredo 2003; Hermans 2002; Hermans and Dimaggio 2007; Salgado and Ferreira 2004; Valsiner 2002; Zittoun 2006).

Methodological Implications

On a methodological level, this theoretical framework requires the development of analytical tools that can account for the heterogeneity of discourse in terms of heteroglossia and multivoicedness. It is what Salazar Orvig and myself (Salazar Orvig and Grossen 2004) aimed at doing in our analysis of discussions collected in focus groups (see also Marková et al. 2007). In these groups, the subjects had to discuss a dilemma dealing with medical confidentiality and to decide whether medical confidentiality should be broken or not. Apart from being analysed through interpersonal dialogue, heteroglossia and multivoicedness were grasped through clues which referred to what Salazar Orvig (2005) called the facets of dialogism, namely: (a) the instability of the subjects' answers in apparently similar types of dilemma, (b) dialogue with distant discourses (when for example a subject refers to regulations concerning medical confidentiality), (c) the dialogue with oneself (for example when the subject develops two contrasting lines of arguments), (d) reported and virtual speech, (e) heteroglossia *stricto sensu* (for example when a subject uses a communicative genre which pertains to law or psychology), (f) the speaker's identification with the characters depicted in the dilemma; this was analysed through the shift of personal pronouns (*I, we, you*) in the speaker's discourse, (g) the speaker's discursive positions (does the speaker mention that he or she speaks from a certain standpoint: that of a student, a man, a lawyer, etc?).

A similar point of view can be adopted for the analysis of face-to-face research interviews. This is what we are currently doing in a study in which school

psychologists were questioned about their professional practice with psychological tests (Grossen et al. 2006). Using partly the same clues as those described by Salazar Orvig, we identified the various voices that populate the interviewee's discourse, for example: the voice of the writers of the test manual; the voice of the organisation in which the psychologists work; the institutional voice of the test designers and of differential psychology; the clients' voice, etc. This is illustrated in Excerpt 4 in which one psychologist is talking about projective tests and tests in general, and in Excerpt 5 in which another psychologist talks about an intelligence test, the WISC[3]:

(4)

1. well you cannot just read the score sheet and say "so and so" because
2. the parents are not dupe "what is he saying this psychologist"

(5)

1. for example in the mathematical subtest of the WISC, the fact that the
2. answer is either correct or wrong is almost anecdotic with respect to-
3. when it is correct err + did he understand or is it, let's say, a
4. thoughtless application, or when it's wrong is it a computation
5. mistake, is it a reasoning mistake, is it a mistake due to a
6. misunderstanding of the instruction, there are completely different
7. things and the result you code it always wrong (...) so I distrust a lot a
8. standard interpretation

The psychologists' discourse refers to at least two different voices: the voices of the parents of the tested child (Excerpt 4, line 2) and the test designers' voice (Excerpt 5). However, whereas in Excerpt 4, the use of direct reported speech provides a rather unambiguous clue indicating the reference to other voices, in Excerpt 5 things are less clear. It is mostly the use of verbal (semantic) categories such as *correct* or *wrong* associated with *answer* (lines 2 and 3), or the expression *standard interpretation* (line 8), and the reference to coding procedures, which allow us to infer the presence of the designers' voices. Still other voices can be identified in this excerpt. For example, the French expression *application bête et méchante* (literally *silly and bad application*, translated here by *thoughtless* in line 4) is a typical expression that mathematics teachers sometimes use to refer to the action of a student who made a mistake by applying a mathematical formula without reasoning. Consequently, we could, in addition, claim that this excerpt also includes voices from the school.

This example illustrates that, in line with dialogical assumptions, even one single word is dialogical and crossed by previous discursive practices. However, put this way, the notion of dialogism applies to every discourse and looses any empirical efficiency. On an empirical level, this statement even leads to a sort of contradiction, since it means that if we want to analyse our data from a dialogical stance, we have to assume that some pieces of discourse are "more" dialogical than others or are even monological. An answer to this apparent contradiction can be found in Morson and Emerson (1990) who stress that Bakhtin himself used the word *dialogue* in different senses (see also Salazar Orvig 2005; Linell 2009). One of them is general

[3] Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children.

and claims that any utterance is by definition dialogical. In a second sense, however, Bakhtin admitted that some utterances may be more monological than others. This is, for example, the case in his comparison between poetic discourse and the discourse of the novel (Bakhtin 1935/1981).

Drawing on the different senses of the term *dialogue* identified by Morson and Emerson (1990), Linell (2009) proposes to make a difference between the monological *vs.* dialogical organisation of a discourse, and its monoperspectivity vs. multiperspectivity. Whereas the first dimension refers to the organisation of a discourse, the second refers to the fact that a piece of discourse (a text) might only present one point of view on its topic. As an example, Linell cites legal, scientific, religious or propaganda texts. All these texts belong to what he calls "monologized texts", texts that tend to defend one unique viewpoint. They are situated in certain social practices but, at the same time, they are also decontextualised in the sense that they try to extend the generalisation of their discourse. Linell emphasises that scientific discourse is both locally monological and "part of a longer traditions of dialogical sense-making" (p. 374). At a local level, it has to defend a certain position with coherence and consistency; in a wider context, it is part of a debate that includes various competing positions and has to situate itself with respect to these various positions.[4] From this viewpoint, we can reconsider Excerpts 4 and 5, and state that it is of course impossible from a researcher's standpoint to capture all the possible voices that are included in a certain piece of discourse. This is due to the fact that scientific practices are locally monologising and also to the fact that language itself is "living discourse" (Bakhtin 1935/1981) and is made up of the history of its multiple usages. On a methodological level, it is thus impossible to grasp the traces of the dialogism of words (or, put differently, of heteroglossia).

Hence, the analysis of the subject's discourse, as well as a scientific report that might be written, necessarily lead to a reduction of the multivoicedness of the subjects' discourse, and *nolens volens* give more emphasis on the analysts' voice. A second (and related) reason is that if we admit with Rommetveit (Josephs 1998) that methods are communicative genres (that is to say dialogues which make sense for the subjects and the researchers within a particular context and in a particular activity), then using this genre is also a way of relating to certain objects, persons and communities of practices. To put it differently, scientific discourse and practices as a "canonised" genre also reflect a certain interpretation of the world and, in this sense, reduce the multivoicedness and heteroglossia of discourse.

These issues show that language is more than a means of communicating our results, it is a tool through which our results (and by extension our disciplines) are constructed.

The Context as a Construction

As was shown earlier on, a factorial conception of interaction views the context as a variable that influences the subject. This conception implies that in certain

[4] In this respect, the paradox, as Linell (2009) emphasises, is that dialogism, or any other theory, is also a monologising practice.

conditions the "effect" of the context can be neutralised and the context can become transparent, as if the influence of the context could equal zero.

This conception was put in jeopardy as early as in the twenties by the sociologists of the School of Chicago who showed that the subjects interpret the situation in which they act and have thus their "definition of the situation" (Thomas and Znaniecki 1981). Since then, the idea that the context is a dynamic product of the subjects' activity has been taken up by many authors and has led them to define the context as a potential interactional resource which is not simply given but is accomplished within and through interactions (e.g., McHoul et al. 2008). Consequently, the context is not a container in which the subjects act, but a dynamic and ever changing process (Goodwin and Duranti 2002).

This view, which fits a dialogical conception of interaction, considerably challenges certain classic objects of study in psychology. In developmental psychology, it has been an incentive to study thinking as an intersubjective process and a context-bound activity. Special emphasis has been put upon the enmeshment between the subject's definition of the situation and cognitive activity (e.g., Wertsch et al. 1984). Research carried out by Rommetveit (1976) showed that the child's answers in a test are tightly linked with the states of intersubjectivity which the adult and the child construct through the interactional dynamics (see also Elbers and Kelderman 1994; Grossen 2000; Säljö 1991). It was also shown that in a test situation, the experimenter is not neutral (Grossen and Perret-Clermont 1994) and that scaffolding strategies (Bruner 1990) such as mutual co-orientation, (mis) alignments and feedbacks, may also be observed in these situations. In other words, the child's cognitive activity cannot be disentangled from the way in which the adult and the child construct the context and make sense of the situation and of the task.

Methodological Implications

Beyond a general agreement that a context is not a set of external variables, there is a debate between two competing views: (a) the first is that interaction analysis should be restricted to resources that the participants themselves use within their interactions in order to construct and transform the context, (b) the second claims that interaction analysis should include ethnographic data concerning the situation in which the subjects interact, for example, the organisational dimension of the work in a hospital.

This debate illustrates that interaction analysis may rely upon two different positions with respect to the choice of a unit of analysis: according to the first position (e.g., Schegloff 1992), the object under study is the conversational machinery (or the dynamics of interactions) as a self-contained activity. The analysis aims at showing how the participants construct the context through the use of different interactional resources. The analysts' explicit intention is to adopt the participants' perspective and to avoid attributing mental states to their subjects. To some extent, and as I understand it, the ambition is to avoid introducing the analysts' voice into an interpretation of the data. In a similar vein, it is also claimed that the use of ethnographic data leads the analysts to draw unverifiable inferences, to over-interpret the material and to unconsciously impose their own perspective (or voices) on the data.

According to the second position (e.g., Cicourel 1992; Gumperz 1982), the object of study concerns the subjects' activity and discourse as context-bound activities.

Researchers assume that the subjects draw upon resources that are not necessarily to be found or displayed within the micro-context of their interactions. For them, the subjects are historically situated social actors who develop various capacities and bodies of knowledge. Therefore, they claim that it is necessary to draw upon ethnographic data and that it is impossible to avoid introducing the analysts' voice into an analysis of the data. For them, sticking to ongoing interactional processes leads to isolating the immediate situation from other situations and eventually amounts to adopting two principles that pertain to experimental designs, namely observing the subjects in a "controlled" laboratory situation and neutralising as much as possible the "experimenter's effect". Moreover, avoiding the attribution of mental states to the subjects amounts to disregarding the fact that analysts cannot escape what seems to be a fundamental characteristic of human beings, namely mutuality and reciprocity (Marková et al. 1995).

To sum up, the debate hinges on whether interaction analysis should be limited to immediate interactions, or should on the contrary include longer (and not always observed) sequences. In my view, the interest of this debate is that it shows a tension between theoretical and methodological requirements. On a theoretical level, taking the multivoicedness and heterogeneity of an interaction fully into account implies that the subjects we observe in a certain situation are social actors who have experienced many other situations. Thus the subjects interpret the situation in which they are involved in the light of their experience in other situations. They talk in a certain situation with direct and indirect reference to earlier discourses. This point of view implies that the unit of analysis should include observations which go beyond immediate interactions. However, on a methodological level, researchers are expected to be rigorous and accountable in the use of their tools. Invoking other situations in order to make sense of what the subjects do in the situation in which they are observed may be more tentative, interpretive and open to discussion. As Schegloff (1992) argues, it also may include some implicit causality that is disputable and is mostly based upon the researchers' assumptions. In my view, this debate shows that being fully dialogical and sticking to standard methodological rules are partly incompatible. In fact, if we want to be accountable for our research practices and offer them for discussion, certain compromises are necessary which, as I showed earlier, present the risk of "monologising" the analysis of the data and their report.

Tools as a Non-Human Agency

In developmental psychology, it is a usual practice to place the subjects in so-called "individual" situations in which they are required (by an Other, namely the experimenter) to carry out a task (on this topic, see Rommetveit 2003). In this context, the unit of analysis is clearly the subject's verbal and non-verbal actions, and when the word "interaction" is used at all, it mostly refers to the actions that a subject carries out in order to solve a problem or answer a question, that is, to the subject-task interactions. The task itself is generally considered to be a method for revealing the subjects' mental states or abilities (as a photosensitised paper reveals its subject).

Now, when linguists study conversation (or verbal interactions), they may observe their subjects in natural settings (everyday conversation, psychotherapy talk, etc.) or ask them to talk about a determined topic in more formal settings. In this type of situation, there is often no material task to carry out and the analysis of the data is mostly focused upon verbal interactions. The problem becomes more complex when the subjects have to carry out a task, or are observed in complex settings (e.g., Engeström and Middleton 1996), such as workplaces, where tools and physical objects are an integral part of their activity. Workplace studies carried out in cockpits (Hutchins and Klausen 1996), undergrounds (Joseph 1994), hospitals (Grosjean and Lacoste 1999) and other firms (Trognon and Grusenmeyer 1997; Wenger 1998), raise challenging issues for psychologists, since they question the assumption that human cognition (or "intelligence") is an internal and individual property, and show that human cognition results from the interaction between a subject, Others, and physical objects and tools. This is an aspect which has been emphasized by Latour (1996) who introduced the notion of *interobjectivity* in order to challenge that of intersubjectivity. According to him, widely shared definitions of interaction (e.g., a situation of co-presence which brings about the emergence of unforeseen behaviour, novelty) ignore the fact that human interactions are mediated by objects which keep their interactions within certain frames. This means that objects have their own agency[5] and contribute to the creation of certain forms of interpersonal interactions. Workplace studies have now provided a body of data showing the mediating roles of tools and physical objects (e.g., Heath and Luff 2000).

Methodological Implications

Workplace studies, and more generally studies focusing upon the role of physical objects and artefacts, are a source of inspiration for the study of situations which are apparently very different from the complex work environment which has been observed in this field. They raise interesting questions about, for example, the role of objects in emotions. Let me briefly illustrate this point with a study on therapeutic processes at work in a brief cognitive-behavioural group therapy for women with eating disorders. Cavaleri Pendino (2008) analysed the interactions between the participants, and the role of a "Self-Monitoring-Form" (SMF) in which the participants had to write down all the aliments they ate in a day and the emotions related to this eating. The analysis of the data associated the participants' discourse with the actions carried out on the SMF (taking it, opening it, leafing it through, etc.) throughout the thirteen sessions of the therapy. The results showed that at the beginning of the therapy, the SMF gave the participants an opportunity to talk about themselves by focusing upon alimentation and food. However, later in the therapy, the use of the SFM was abandoned and the participants began to produce self-narratives which were not directly linked with eating. In other words, the SFM worked as a sort of release mechanism (or mediator) that enabled the participants to move out of the field of eating and being over-weight, and to talk about their emotional life.

[5] Let us note, however, that the role of object ("physical thing") was already a special concern for Mead (1932).

This example shows that physical objects are not merely incidental to the participants' verbal interactions. Physical objects and tools constitute non-human partners which contribute to the organisation of the activity and to the construction of the interaction (Grossen et al. 1997). Moreover (and to put it plainly), this line of research challenges the very idea that emotions and cognitions are "inside" whereas physical objects and Others are "outside" the subject.

However, apprehending the Subject, Others and physical object interactions as a whole (a dynamic field) raises an important issue: do all the constituents of this totality play a similar role? Speaking of complementarity between these three constituents is not to imply a fusion. This should be remembered if we do not want to reduce the issue of subjectivity to one of intersubjectivity (Valsiner 1998). In this view, such questions as: do the subjects learn a new competence? Do they construct new meanings for their own life history or emotions? Do they change their behaviour? How do they change their environment? remain relevant questions that prevent us from falling into the possible trap of seeing the subject as a product of the environment, and stepping back into a deterministic vision of the relationship between the subject and the environment. The real challenge, however, is to answer these questions without adopting a monological stance and without getting rid of the notion of the subject. What is needed then is a better understanding of the way in which intersubjectivity and, let us say, "interobjectivity" contribute to the construction of certain forms of subjectivity which are fundamentally intersubjective.

Conclusion

Starting from a reflection on the conception of interaction in the field of psychology, this article was aimed at discussing some methodological issues that emerge when researchers try to put dialogical assumptions into research practices.

My discussion was organised around four assumptions underlying a dialogical approach (the co-construction of meaning, multivoicedness and heteroglossia, the context as a construction, and tools as non-human agency). After a brief description of each assumption, I examined the methodological implications of this dialogical stance and discussed some methodological difficulties or challenges. In so doing, my aim was to test the limitations of these analytical tools and to see whether they are actually fully consistent with their dialogical assumptions. Let me now focus upon the four methodological implications which were discussed in this article.

A first methodological implication is to assume that the dialogicality of the human mind implies working on interaction conceived of as interlocution, and not as the sum of individual actions. Consequently, our methodological tools have to account for the way in which discourse circulates from one speaker to another, and to show how a speaker is liable to take up another's discourse and to integrate it into his or her own discourse as if it were his or her own. As I showed with the example of reformulation, this is not an easy task, since in order to analyse a dialogue, researchers have necessarily to isolate a piece of discourse from a chain of discourse, with the risk of monologising discourse. In this particular example, it means that since any formulation is to some extent always the reformulation of another discourse, talking about "reformulation" derives partially from the method itself.

A second methodological implication is that studying verbal interaction in a dialogical approach requires being able to account not only for interlocution but for multivoicedness and heteroglossia, that is for internal dialogue. As I showed, an important difficulty in this respect is to determine what is a voice and what heteroglossia exactly entails. At a very general level in fact, language is made by and through heteroglossia, and identifying voices, for example, is impossible (Morson and Emerson 1990). A challenge is then to define a grain of analysis that enables us on the one hand to exploit the notion of multivoicedness and heteroglossia in order to account for the dialogicality of discourse, but, on the other hand to do it in a way that does not, paradoxically, induce the idea that there might be a discourse without any trace of heteroglossia or multivoicedness.

A third implication derives from the idea that a context is not only a set of external variables which influence individual actions or interindividual interactions. In this regard, I showed that there is a tension between, on the one hand, situating a certain interaction within its social environment, institutional setting, etc. (that is accounting for the connectedness between the present situation and other situations), and on the other hand setting oneself a certain rigour in the analysis of the data, by avoiding making inferences that go far beyond what could be understood from the data. Here again, whereas accounting for the way in which situations relate to each others seems to be in line with a dialogical approach, the rigour imposed by methodology might induce a certain monologisation of the data, that is, in this case, a certain decontextualisation of the data.

A fourth methodological implication stems from the fact that human interactions are always mediated by semiotic tools as well as by tools and artefacts. The latter might not only constrain or frame interindividual interactions (such as, for example, a table in a face-to-face interview), but also be part of the interaction itself (for instance, the self-monitoring form in the group therapy which was presented). So, a challenge is to develop methodological tools that are able to show the intertwinement between discourse and artefacts, and to account for multimodal interactions. Here, the difficulty lies in the fact that considering human and non-human agency as a totality, a system, does not, or should not, imply that all elements of this totality are equal. A further challenge is thus to account for the differences between these various sorts of agencies.

In conclusion, a close examination of these methodological implications together with their difficulties and challenges shows that the passage from theory to research practice entails a transformation process, which leads us to decontextualise the data and, thus, to monologise them. My argument was that, even in a dialogical perspective, researchers experience a tension between trying to account for the complexity of a situation and monologising the object of their observations by following certain methodological rules. In my view, however, this tension cannot be avoided and is representative of another fundamental tension in research into human activity: that of accounting both for the stability of certain phenomena and for their ongoing change.

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